

The Art of Music



American Paintings & Musical Instruments 1770–1910

Whitney Museum of American Art at Philip Morris

July 19–September 19, 1984



WILLIAM M. HARNETT *Music and Literature*, 1878 Oil on canvas, 24 x 32 $\frac{1}{8}$ inches Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo; Gift of Seymour H. Knox

The Art of Music

American Paintings & Musical Instruments 1770–1910

Music was an integral part of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century American life. By late colonial times, lusty psalm-singing and Baroque chamber concerts were major forms of music-making in America. In the next century, music gained in diversity and popularity: parlor music was developed for the home, hearty folk music spread through rural communities, and both vaudeville and military music-making drew Americans together from all walks of life. This involvement with music expressed itself with particular vitality in the sister art of painting, and depictions of musical subjects give us a full and spirited picture of early American culture.

The tradition of music in painting—like the American musical tradition itself—had its roots in European art. In religious painting, portraiture, still life, and genre, European artists had explored the meaning of music in religion, they had used instruments as symbolic attributes to delineate character, and they had celebrated music-making as a high point of human endeavor. They had delighted especially in the conundrums and visual ironies of portraying music as something that could be seen but not heard.

American painters did much the same with the musical subjects at hand in the New World. Their religious music-making remained an important pastime—everything from flutes to bass viols were played in church and many instruments put in an appearance at camp meetings—and musical talent was cultivated as a sign of refinement. Around 1824 Charles Bird King posed Mrs. John Quincy Adams with a harp, an instrument associated with culture and gentility. As the painting by an anonymous artist, *A Ceremonial at a Young Ladies' Seminary* (c. 1810), indicates, musical instruction was a significant aspect of a middle-class upbringing. Music-making also had its place in the busiest political lives—Connecticut legislator Philo Ruggles, for instance, was a dedicated flutist—and music went to war. American ingenuity was responsible for the invention of “backfiring” brass instruments used in military drills and

marches, albeit not under such chaotic circumstances as those depicted in James Goodwyn Clonney’s rather primitive *Militia Training* (1841).

In the latter part of the nineteenth century, paintings of musical subjects reflected a shift from homespun simplicity to urban and industrial modernity; from cultural nationalism to cosmopolitan interests; and from domesticity to socializing to a dialogue with the self. Depicting musical subjects became a self-referential act on the part of artists, many of whom had close ties to musicians and music-making. The theme of music, which suggested creativity, reflection, and inspiration, became a form of painterly self-portraiture. Women were both frequent sitters and artist surrogates in many musical pictures; a genteel woman making music or meditatively holding a musical instrument could symbolize the artist’s own view of his profession.

If the presence of musical instruments in late nineteenth-century American portraits, still lifes, and genre painting was physical, the presence of music was metaphysical—subjective and internalized, intangible and enigmatic. Stacy Tolman’s picture of a trio performing in an artist’s studio (*The Musicale*, 1887) hints at the invisible connections between painting and music, and Jefferson David Chalfant’s *The Old Violin* (1888) shows the instrument hanging against a time-worn wall as if to suggest music as a metaphor for transience. Music is used to get at the meaning of art and, in terms of both artists and subjects, to strike the chords that reveal the self.

CELIA BETSKY

This exhibition was organized by the Fred L. Emerson Gallery, Hamilton College, Clinton, New York.

Checklist

Dimensions of paintings are given in inches, height preceding width. The names of the fabricators of musical instruments listed in the first line of each checklist item are given in the form in which they appear on the instrument. The works are arranged chronologically.

PAINTINGS

Benjamin West (1738–1820)

Miss Young, Subsequently Wife of Richard Otley, c. 1770

Oil on canvas, 29½ x 24½

Anglo-American Art Museum, Louisiana
State University, Baton Rouge

Ralph Earl (1751–1801)

Philo Ruggles, 1796

Oil on canvas, 48 x 34½

The Litchfield Historical Society and
Museum, Litchfield, Connecticut

Anonymous

A Ceremonial at a Young Ladies' Seminary,
c. 1810

Oil on canvas, 30⅛ x 39⅛

The Chrysler Museum, Norfolk, Virginia;
Gift of Edgar and Bernice Chrysler
Garbisch

Charles Bird King (1785–1862)

Mrs. John Quincy Adams, c. 1824

Oil on canvas, 51½ x 39⅝

National Museum of American Art,
Smithsonian Institution, Washington,
D.C.; Adams-Clement Collection, Gift of
Mary Louisa Adams Clement

I. John Bradley (active 1830–1855)

The Cellist, 1832

Oil on canvas, 17¾ x 16

The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.

Anonymous

Man with Bass Viol, c. 1835

Oil on canvas, 30 x 25

Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Willis Henry

Anonymous

Man with Flute, c. 1835

Oil on canvas, 30 x 25

Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Willis Henry

Anonymous

Portrait of a Lady with an Accordion,
c. 1838–43

Oil on canvas, 29½ x 25

Anglo-American Art Museum, Louisiana
State University, Baton Rouge

James Goodwyn Clonney (1812–1867)

Militia Training, 1841

Oil on canvas, 28 x 40

Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts,
Philadelphia; Henry C. Carey Collection

Alphonse-Léon Noël (1807–1884), after
William Sidney Mount

The Power of Music, 1848

Hand-colored lithograph on paper, 20 x 22⅜

The Museums at Stony Brook, New York;

Bequest of Ward Melville

John Whetten Ehninger (1827–1889)

Old Kentucky Home, 1863

Oil on canvas, 15¼ x 9

The Shelburne Museum, Shelburne, Vermont

John George Brown (1831–1913)

The Music Lesson, 1870

Oil on canvas, 24 x 20

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New
York; Gift of Colonel Charles A. Fowler

Eastman Johnson (1824–1906)

The Voice of the Harp, 1872

Oil on academy board, 22 x 18

Private collection

Thomas Eakins (1844–1916)

Elizabeth at the Piano, 1875

Oil on canvas, 72⅛ x 48

Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips
Academy, Andover, Massachusetts

George Henry Story (1835–1923)

The Organ Grinder, 1877

Oil on canvas, 23½ x 15⅞

Berry-Hill Galleries, New York

William M. Harnett (1848–1892)

Music and Literature, 1878

Oil on canvas, 24 x 32⅛

Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo; Gift of
Seymour H. Knox

Arthur B. Davies (1862–1928)

Romance, c. 1880

Oil on board, 13 x 10

Neuberger Museum, State University of New
York, College at Purchase; Gift of Roy R.
Neuberger

Dennis Miller Bunker (1861–1890)

The Guitar Player, 1885

Oil on canvas, 26⅛ x 38⅞

Private collection

Stacy Tolman (1860–1935)

The Musicale, 1887

Oil on canvas, 36⅛ x 46⅞

The Brooklyn Museum, New York; Dick S.
Ramsay Fund

Jefferson David Chalfant (1856–1931)

The Old Violin, 1888

Oil on canvas on board, 40 x 28½

Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington; Louisa
du Pont Copeland Memorial Fund

Frank W. Benson (1862–1951)

Memories, 1910

Oil on canvas, 20 x 24

Berry-Hill Galleries, New York

Thomas W. Dewing (1851–1938)
Lady in Grey, c. 1910
 Oil on canvas, 28 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 13 $\frac{1}{2}$
 Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of
 Design, Providence; Jesse Metcalf Fund

INSTRUMENTS

Schindler
 One-keyed Flute, c. 1770
 Stained boxwood with brass key
 Collection of Frederick R. Selch

William Whiteley
 Fife, c. 1810
 Stained boxwood with ivory ferrules
 Collection of Frederick R. Selch

Meacham
 Bassoon in C, c. 1810–13
 Maple with brass keys
 The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New
 York; The Crosby Brown Collection of
 Musical Instruments

Bacon and Hart
 One-keyed Flute, c. 1815
 Boxwood with ivory rings and brass key
 Collection of Frederick R. Selch

Anonymous
 Hammered Dulcimer, c. 1815–20
 Carved wood standing on Sheraton table
 The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New
 York; Purchase, Rogers Fund, Bequest of
 Dorothy E. Swenson, by exchange, The
 Crosby Brown Collection of Musical
 Instruments, by exchange, and George D.
 Skinner Gift

William Whiteley
 Four-keyed Flute, c. 1820
 Boxwood with ivory rings and brass keys
 Collection of Frederick R. Selch

William Whiteley
 One-keyed Piccolo, c. 1820
 Boxwood with ivory rings and brass key
 Collection of Frederick R. Selch

Gibson and Davis
 Square Piano, c. 1820–25
 Wood with standard English “hopper”
 damper mechanism
 The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New
 York; Gift of anonymous donor

Hopf
 Violin, c. 1825
 Spruce belly, maple back, neck, and sides,
 rosewood-veneered fingerboard, and
 mother-of-pearl inlaid pegs
 Collection of Frederick R. Selch

A. Hopkins
 Clarinet in C, c. 1825
 Flowered boxwood with ivory rings and
 black wood mouthpiece
 Collection of Frederick R. Selch

Abraham Prescott
 Bass Viol (large model), c. 1825
 Spruce belly, maple back, neck, and sides,
 and maple fingerboard
 Collection of Frederick R. Selch

Edward Riley
 Violoncello, c. 1825
 Spruce belly, maple back and sides, and oak
 neck and fingerboard
 Collection of Frederick R. Selch

Anonymous
 Accordion, c. 1830
 Black stained wood keyboard with mother-of-
 pearl keys and mahogany box
 Collection of Frederick R. Selch

Anonymous
 Harp, c. 1830
 Pine and hardwood
 Collection of Gene Bruck and Marianne
 Wurlitzer

Anonymous
 Keyed Bugle in C, c. 1830
 Copper with brass trim
 Collection of Frederick R. Selch

Anonymous
 Cornet with Piston Valve, c. 1835
 Brass with stozel valves
 Collection of Jason Bakwin Selch

Schmidt and Maul
 Spanish Guitar, c. 1835
 Spruce belly, mahogany back and sides
 Collection of Frederick R. Selch

Anonymous
 Clarinet in E-Flat, c. 1840
 Stained boxwood with ivory rings, brass keys,
 and black wood mouthpiece
 Collection of Frederick R. Selch

Anonymous
 Country Fiddle, c. 1840
 Pine belly and pegs and oak back, neck,
 and sides
 Collection of Frederick R. Selch

D. Bartlett
 Rocking Melodion, c. 1840
 Rosewood with ivory button keyboard,
 tortoiseshell knob, and pine box
 Collection of Frederick R. Selch

William Boucher, Jr.
 Banjo, c. 1840
 Gourd body with tacked vellum skin
 The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New
 York; The Crosby Brown Collection of
 Musical Instruments

(continued)

The Art of Music

American Paintings & Musical Instruments 1770–1910

Music was an integral part of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century American life. By late colonial times, lusty psalm-singing and Baroque chamber concerts were major forms of music-making in America. In the next century, music gained in diversity and popularity: parlor music was developed for the home, hearty folk music spread through rural communities, and both vaudeville and military music-making drew Americans together from all walks of life. This involvement with music expressed itself with particular vitality in the sister art of painting, and depictions of musical subjects give us a full and spirited picture of early American culture.

The tradition of music in painting—like the American musical tradition itself—had its roots in European art. In religious painting, portraiture, still life, and genre, European artists had explored the meaning of music in religion, they had used instruments as symbolic attributes to delineate character, and they had celebrated music-making as a high point of human endeavor. They had delighted especially in the conundrums and visual ironies of portraying music as something that could be seen but not heard.

American painters did much the same with the musical subjects at hand in the New World. Their religious music-making remained an important pastime—everything from flutes to bass viols were played in church and many instruments put in an appearance at camp meetings—and musical talent was cultivated as a sign of refinement. Around 1824 Charles Bird King posed Mrs. John Quincy Adams with a harp, an instrument associated with culture and gentility. As the painting by an anonymous artist, *A Ceremonial at a Young Ladies' Seminary* (c. 1810), indicates, musical instruction was a significant aspect of a middle-class upbringing. Music-making also had its place in the busiest political lives—Connecticut legislator Philo Ruggles, for instance, was a dedicated flutist—and music went to war. American ingenuity was responsible for the invention of “backfiring” brass instruments used in military drills and

marches, albeit not under such chaotic circumstances as those depicted in James Goodwyn Clonney’s rather primitive *Militia Training* (1841).

In the latter part of the nineteenth century, paintings of musical subjects reflected a shift from homespun simplicity to urban and industrial modernity: from cultural nationalism to cosmopolitan interests; and from domesticity to socializing to a dialogue with the self. Depicting musical subjects became a self-referential act on the part of artists, many of whom had close ties to musicians and music-making. The theme of music, which suggested creativity, reflection, and inspiration, became a form of painterly self-portraiture. Women were both frequent sitters and artist surrogates in many musical pictures; a genteel woman making music or meditatively holding a musical instrument could symbolize the artist’s own view of his profession.

If the presence of musical instruments in late nineteenth-century American portraits, still lifes, and genre painting was physical, the presence of music was metaphysical—subjective and internalized, intangible and enigmatic. Stacy Tolman’s picture of a trio performing in an artist’s studio (*The Musicale*, 1887) hints at the invisible connections between painting and music, and Jefferson David Chalfant’s *The Old Violin* (1888) shows the instrument hanging against a time-worn wall as if to suggest music as a metaphor for transience. Music is used to get at the meaning of art and, in terms of both artists and subjects, to strike the chords that reveal the self.

CELIA BETSKY

This exhibition was organized by the Fred L. Emerson Gallery, Hamilton College, Clinton, New York.

Firth Hall & Pond Franklin
Clarinet in B-Flat, c. 1840
Boxwood with ivory rings, brass keys, and
black wood mouthpiece
Collection of Frederick R. Selch

Ronnberg
Eight-keyed Flute, c. 1840
Rosewood with metal-lined ivory head-joint
and silver ferrules
Collection of Frederick R. Selch

Whitaker and Frisbie
Melodeon, c. 1845
Mahogany reed organ
Collection of Frederick R. Selch

Samuel Clark
Violin, 1846
Spruce belly and stained maple back, neck,
and sides
Collection of Frederick R. Selch

Anonymous
Trumpet in D, c. 1850
Brass
Collection of Frederick R. Selch

A. G. Badger & Co.
Boehm System Flute, c. 1850
Silver
Collection of Frederick R. Selch

George Kilbourn
Military Field Drum, c. 1850
Varnished oak with stained maple hoops
Collection of Frederick R. Selch

Geo Cloos
Six-keyed Piccolo, c. 1860
Rosewood with metal-lined ivory-head joint
and silver ferrules
Collection of Frederick R. Selch

Crosby
Fife, c. 1860
Black wood with silver ferrules
Collection of Frederick R. Selch

Preston
English Guitar or Cetra, c. 1870
Spruce belly, flamed-maple back, neck, and
sides, and bronze rose
Collection of Frederick R. Selch

Slater & Martin
Cornet with rotary valves, c. 1870
Nickel-brass
Collection of Frederick R. Selch

M. C. Dobson
Banjo, c. 1881
Oak neck, ebony fingerboard, brass hoop,
and vellum head
Collection of Martha Hamilton-Phillips

Jerome B. Squier
Violin, 1884
Spruce belly and flamed-maple back, neck,
and sides
Collection of Frederick R. Selch

Anonymous
Mandolin, c. 1895
Pine belly, rosewood back, and ebony fingerboard
Collection of Frederick R. Selch

Anonymous
Military Bugle in D, nineteenth century
Brass
Collection of Frederick R. Selch

Anonymous
Minstrel Bones, nineteenth century
Wood
Collection of Frederick R. Selch

Anonymous
Tambourine, late nineteenth century
Birchwood hoop with vellum head and metal disks
Collection of Frederick R. Selch

**Whitney Museum of American Art
at Philip Morris**
120 Park Avenue
New York, N.Y. 10022

Gallery Hours
Monday–Saturday 11:00–6:00
Thursday until 7:30
Free Admission

Gallery Talks
Monday, Wednesday, Friday at 12:30
Tours by appointment
For information call (212) 878-2550

Staff
Lisa Phillips
Head, Branch Museums, and Associate Curator
Susan Lubowsky
Manager, Whitney Museum of American Art
at Philip Morris
Sarah Warren
Assistant Manager
Janis Krasnow
Gallery Assistant

Design
Elizabeth Finger
Typesetting
Haber Typographers Inc.
Printing
Eastern Press, Inc.

© 1984 Whitney Museum of American Art

Firth Hall & Pond Franklin
Clarinet in B-Flat, c. 1840
Boxwood with ivory rings, brass keys, and
black wood mouthpiece
Collection of Frederick R. Selch

Ronnberg
Eight-keyed Flute, c. 1840
Rosewood with metal-lined ivory head-joint
and silver ferrules
Collection of Frederick R. Selch

Whitaker and Frisbie
Melodeon, c. 1845
Mahogany reed organ
Collection of Frederick R. Selch

Samuel Clark
Violin, 1846
Spruce belly and stained maple back, neck,
and sides
Collection of Frederick R. Selch

Anonymous
Trumpet in D, c. 1850
Brass
Collection of Frederick R. Selch

A. G. Badger & Co.
Boehm System Flute, c. 1850
Silver
Collection of Frederick R. Selch

George Kilbourn
Military Field Drum, c. 1850
Varnished oak with stained maple hoops
Collection of Frederick R. Selch

Geo Cloos
Six-keyed Piccolo, c. 1860
Rosewood with metal-lined ivory-head joint
and silver ferrules
Collection of Frederick R. Selch

Crosby
Fife, c. 1860
Black wood with silver ferrules
Collection of Frederick R. Selch

Preston
English Guitar or Cetra, c. 1870
Spruce belly, flamed-maple back, neck, and
sides, and bronze rose
Collection of Frederick R. Selch

Slater & Martin
Cornet with rotary valves, c. 1870
Nickel-brass
Collection of Frederick R. Selch

M. C. Dobson
Banjo, c. 1881
Oak neck, ebony fingerboard, brass hoop,
and vellum head
Collection of Martha Hamilton-Phillips

Jerome B. Squier
Violin, 1884
Spruce belly and flamed-maple back, neck,
and sides
Collection of Frederick R. Selch

Anonymous
Mandolin, c. 1895
Pine belly, rosewood back, and ebony fingerboard
Collection of Frederick R. Selch

Anonymous
Military Bugle in D, nineteenth century
Brass
Collection of Frederick R. Selch

Anonymous
Minstrel Bones, nineteenth century
Wood
Collection of Frederick R. Selch

Anonymous
Tambourine, late nineteenth century
Birchwood hoop with vellum head and metal disks
Collection of Frederick R. Selch

**Whitney Museum of American Art
at Philip Morris**
120 Park Avenue
New York, New York 10022

Gallery Hours
Monday–Saturday 11:00–6:00
Thursday until 7:30
Free Admission

Gallery Talks
Monday, Wednesday, Friday at 12:30
Tours by appointment
For information call (212) 878-2550

Staff
Lisa Phillips
Head, Branch Museums, and Associate Curator
Susan Lubowsky
Manager, Whitney Museum of American Art
at Philip Morris
Sarah Warren
Assistant Manager
Janis Krasnow
Gallery Assistant

Design
Elizabeth Finger
Typesetting
Haber Typographers Inc.
Printing
Eastern Press, Inc.

© 1984 Whitney Museum of American Art